

Excellence and Gender Equality: Critical Perspectives on Gender and Knowledge in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conference, June 2019

Outcomes report

Grant details

- A short introduction stating the reason why you sought funding from the Gender Institute and what you were able to achieve with this grant

The claim that research excellence integrally involves an equity component has been important in the recent push to improve diversity in Australia, the USA, UK and Europe. It forms part of a generic business case for gender equity in academia, which holds that diversity adds value. The focus, however, has typically been on STEM disciplines and relates closely to values associated with scientific innovation. This conference explored the nature of current discourse on gender equality and excellence as relevant to HASS (humanities and social sciences) disciplines. This discussion built on research into HASS disciplines undertaken as part of the ARC-funded 'Gendered Excellence in the Social Sciences' project and was particularly timely in the context of the SAGE initiative in Australia.

Papers at the conference explored a wide range of questions of interest to all concerned with gender equality in universities. What kind of diversity initiatives are effective? Do new equality and diversity discourses cover over rather than address crucial issues of power and authority? How can the contribution of critical feminist scholarship within HASS disciplines be brought into relation with the new gender equality discourses? And do generic accounts of excellence and gender equality downplay the significance of specific and conflicted histories of gender relations in the formation of disciplinary knowledge and standards?

The conference allowed leading scholars in the field to present to key stakeholders in gender and equity from the Academy of the Social Sciences (ASSA), the Academy of Humanities (AHA), the Australian Research Council (ARC), SAGE, and university leadership, as well as to their colleagues. Vibrant discussion was generated across the two-and-a-half very packed days, much of which was incorporated by the conference convenors into a report to the ASSA which was begun in a roundtable of stakeholders on the day before the conference.

Event details

- The title of the project/event/initiative

Excellence and Gender Equality: Critical Perspectives on Gender and Knowledge in the Humanities and Social Sciences

- Date(s) of the event

Wednesday 26 to Friday 28 June 2019

- A brief description of the project/event/initiative

The two-and-a-half day conference included five keynote speakers (of which one was a public lecture) and 15 papers presented by 35 scholars to an audience of 44 registrants comprising graduate students (8) early career (7) and senior researchers (20) university leaders (5) and policy makers (4).

- A short comment on how the project exceeded or fell short of expectations

This event was very well-received and I think exceeded expectations for the quality of papers and depth of discussion. To give some indicative feedback -

Prof Michele Lamont (Harvard) wrote:

I hope that the conference concluded in full glory and that the organizing team feels proud of the wonderful accomplishment. Thanks so much again for making us part of the conversation. I enjoyed every bit of it and learned a lot.

I shared your project website with the climate survey group at our Gov department. You may hear from them.

Prof Frank Dobbin (Harvard) wrote;

Many thanks again for inviting us to your absolutely terrific conference on excellence and gender equality. Terrific group of people in the room, each with super interesting insights. I really appreciated the contributions from your team, on what we miss out on substantively if we starve fields of feminist scholars. We hear so much about diversity for its own sake, or worse, for the sake of regulators. It was refreshing to be reminded of how impoverished our disciplines are when they lack feminist contributors. It also made me appreciate sociology more, as feminists have so shaped the field in recent years that feminist thought is in the air we breathe.

The comparative statistics on women's representation in the social sciences, across countries, are also very important to think about.

Thoroughly enjoyed the presentations, discussions, meals, and side conversations. Such interesting folks all around.

And many thanks for your thoughtful hospitality.

- The names of speakers or panellists, with a short biography on each

Keynote speakers

Michele Lamont, Professor of Sociology and of African and African American Studies and Robert I. Goldman Professor of European Studies at Harvard University. She is the recipient of the 2017 Erasmus prize for her contributions to the social sciences in Europe and the rest of the world. Her most recent publications include the co-authored book *Getting Respect: Responding to Stigma and Discrimination in the United States, Brazil, and Israel* (Princeton University Press, 2016); a special issue of the *British Journal of Sociology* on "The Trump/Brexit Moment: Causes and Consequences"; and her ASA Presidential Address "Addressing Recognition Gaps: Destigmatization and the Reduction of Inequality," published in *American Sociological Review*.

Frank Dobbin, professor of sociology at Harvard University. Dobbin is author of *Inventing Equal Opportunity* (Princeton University Press, 2009), which won the Max Weber and Distinguished Scholarly Book Awards from the American Sociological Association. With Alexandra Kalev, he is developing an evidence-based approach to diversity management, studying both the effects of corporate diversity programs on actual workforce diversity, and the effects of workforce diversity on corporate performance. In a new project, he is exploring how university hiring, promotion, diversity, work-life, and harassment programs have shaped faculty diversity over the last quarter century.

Alison Wylie, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Philosophy of the Social and Behavioural Sciences at the University of British Columbia. Wylie works on epistemic and ethical/political issues raised by archaeological practice and by feminist research in the social sciences. Her recent publications include *Material Evidence* (2015) and *Evidential Reasoning in Archaeology* (2016), co-edited and co-authored with archaeologist Bob Chapman; journal articles on “What Knowers Know Well” (*Scientiae Studia*, 2017) and “How Archaeological Evidence Bites Back” (*STHV*, 2017); and contributions to collections such as the *Springer Handbook of Model-based Science* (2017) and *Objectivity in Science* (2015).

Claire Donovan, Reader in Science Policy and Research Governance at Brunel Business School, Brunel University London. Donovan has published widely on research evaluation and policy, the governance of social science, gender and higher education, and the role of the university in society. She has given advice on assessing the broader impacts of research to various governments, including policymakers in Australia, Canada, the USA and the UK. She previously held research and teaching positions at The Open University, Oxford University, and The Australian National University. She is an International PI on the ARC Discovery Project ‘Gendered Excellence in the Social Sciences’, with Fiona Jenkins, Helen Keane and Marian Sawer.

Yannik Thiem, Associate Professor in the Department of Religion at Columbia University and Associate Professor of Philosophy at Villanova University. Thiem specialises in feminist theory, queer theory, religion and politics, critical theory and political philosophy, and maintains an interest in the ethics and politics of research and publication in the humanities. Thiem is the author of *Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility* (Fordham UP, 2008), with a second book *Ripples of Redemptive Time: The Ethics and Politics of Temporality in Hermann Cohen and Walter Benjamin* under contract with Fordham UP. Most of Thiem’s work to date was published under Thiem’s previous name, Annika Thiem.

Impact

- Give an indication of the number of participants and their academic levels (e.g. postgraduates, ECRs, senior researchers, etc.)

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- Specify, if possible, the affiliations of attendees (i.e. ANU internals vs ANU externals)

Of the 40 presenters, 10 were from the ANU, 21 were from other Australian universities (including Melbourne, Sydney, Western Australia, Tasmania, Monash, James Cook, Wollongong, UNSW and RMIT), two were from the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and seven were from overseas: Harvard and Columbia in the US, Quebec at Montreal and British Columbia in Canada, Brunel University London in the UK, and the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka.

- Give details of the impact or outcomes of the event/project for the University and the wider community, and assess the extent to which you achieved what you set out to do

The feedback from the event was overwhelmingly positive, with many remarking that it had opened their eyes to deeper structures of inequality in academic life than they had previously considered. A useful wrap-up session discussed the practical lessons leaders in the sector would take back to their work promoting gender equity. The influence of the discussion also has been felt in the Academy of Social

Sciences Australia, which sponsored a related workshop on the day prior to the conference and the Academy for the Humanities Australia, which invited Associate Professor Jenkins to provide input to a report on the Futures of Humanities in Australia.

Many participants tweeted from the conference using the hashtag #GESS2019, including Dr Karen Downing, a researcher on the GESS project who 'live' tweeted from every session. Tweets were retweeted and commented on and allowed 'virtual' participation in the conference.

Outcomes

- The event program, if available

See pdf file.

- The event/project flyer or poster, if available

N/A

- Submit any photographs and/or videos (in the highest possible resolution) separately in order to maintain the quality of the image.

In Dropbox folder: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/e3vczfgesin5i2p/AAC-64h_Frzek2VfCV1ztj32a?dl=0

- If you event/project receive any media coverage please include any articles, press clippings, podcasts, radio interviews, etc.

Media coverage

Pia Rowe, 'Gender equality in social sciences – What are we missing?' *The Agenda*, 1 July 2019, <https://www.broadagenda.com.au/2019/gender-equality-in-social-sciences-what-are-the-problems/>

Publications resulting from conference

Under preparation:

Special issue of *Journal of Social Philosophy* edited by Fiona Jenkins and Amandine Catala, including articles by conference participants: Alison Wylie's keynote; Fiona Jenkins, 'Philosophy among the social sciences: Women, disciplines, and progress'; Amandine Catala; Millicent Churcher

Forthcoming papers:

Helen Keane and Rebecca Pearse, 'Feminist knowledge projects in Australian universities: Careers, disciplines, and intellectual labour'

Claire Donovan, 'Do we need a feminist bibliometrics?'